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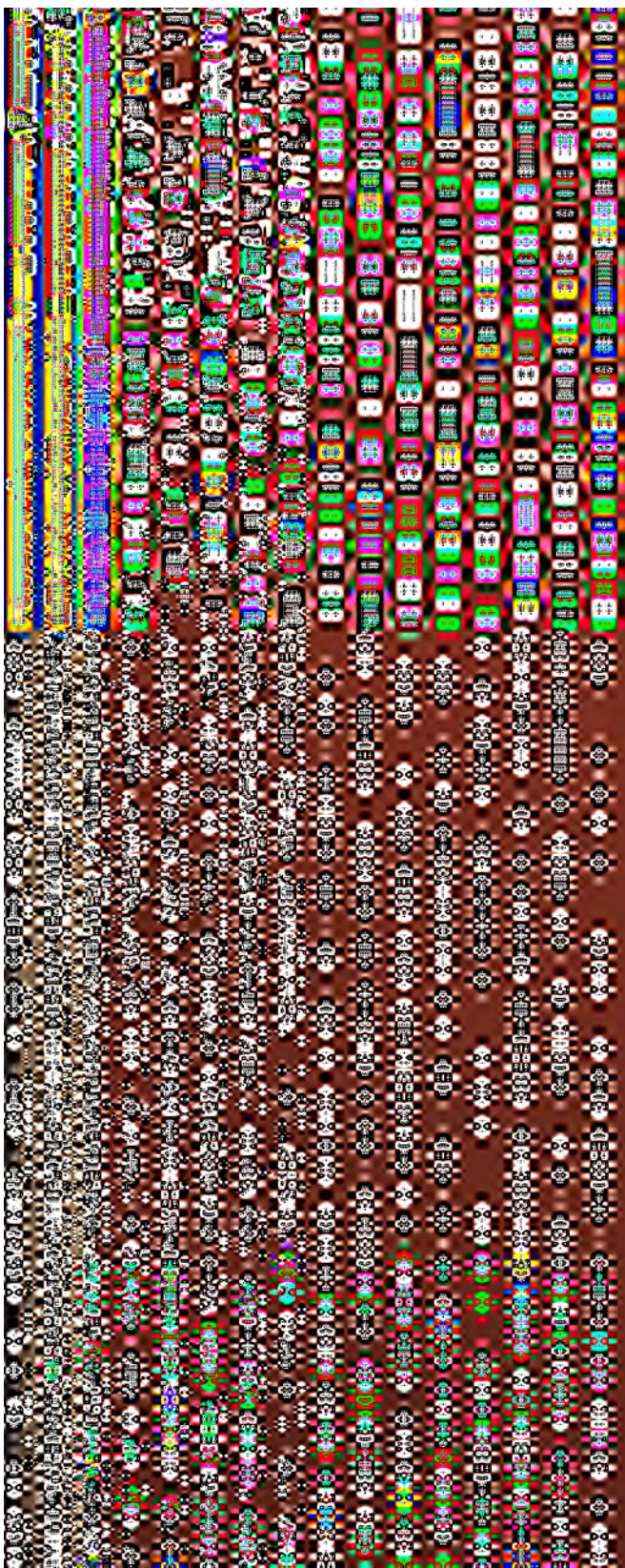
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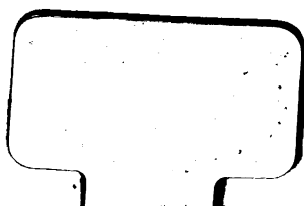
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SERMON,
PREACHED AT THE ANNIVERSARY

OF

The Dehon and Greter Hospital,

AUGUST 25, 1818.

By EDWARD COPLESTON, D.D.

**PROVOST OF ORIEL COLLEGE, OXFORD, AND PREBENDARY
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1818.

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TO THE
HONOURABLE AND RIGHT REVEREND
GEORGE
LORD BISHOP OF EXETER,
THE ZEALOUS PATRON
OF EVERY BENEVOLENT AND USEFUL INSTITUTION
WITHIN HIS DIOCESE,
THIS SERMON,
PUBLISHED BY DESIRE OF HIS LORDSHIP
AND OF
THE GOVERNORS WHO ATTENDED,
IS WITH THE GREATEST RESPECT INSCRIBED
BY
THE AUTHOR.



HAVING failed in my endeavours to obtain from the Editor of the Christian Observer a correction of the wrong which had been done me by a gross misrepresentation of the argument of this Discourse, although I am bound to acknowledge the civility with which my remonstrance has been received, yet I cannot omit the only course which remains of defending myself from an unjust charge—that of circulating the Sermon itself with the accusation appended to it. Some part of this accusation is expressed in terms which I did not imagine any one could have used who had the personal knowledge of me, which the writer of that article in the Christian Observer evidently has. Certainly what is imputed to me in some of the following extracts denotes a state of mind and a habit of thinking to which I am a perfect stranger; and against the suspicion of which I should never have thought of taking any precaution. But the strain of commendation and even of compliment which my accuser employs in other passages, for things wholly unconnected with the occasion of this Discourse, must naturally impress a belief on all who do not know me, that the blame is not only just and

reasonable, but even extorted by the force of truth from one otherwise disposed to think favourably of the author.

I wish, however, to keep out of sight all considerations arising from personal character, or from professional service on other occasions, and to appeal at once to the judgment of every unprejudiced reader, whether the Sermon justifies the representation given of it in these passages.

*Extracts from the Christian Observer for
November, 1818.*

1. "We must confess that in the whole course of our critical labours, we never recollect to have examined a Sermon more completely exclusive of every motive to benevolence deduced from those principles which are peculiar to the Christian dispensation."

2. "We wish to see the Christian preacher derive his principal inducements and motives for the exercise of relative duties from divine sources. His reference should be 'to the law and to the testimony:' his inquiry, 'What saith the Scripture?' his argument, 'Thus saith the Lord.'"

3. "What would be thought of the ambassador of an earthly sovereign, who should scarcely attempt to mention his master's name, to *allude to his express wishes*, or to promote his peculiar interests?"

4. "That the present has little or no claim to the appellation of a Christian discourse, must be admitted

“to be a charge founded in strict truth, on an appeal
 “to its internal evidence. What is the amount of the
 “religion which it comprises? In the course of twenty-
 “three pages the word God certainly occurs five times
 “... the idea of the divine Being occurs once more, at p.
 “16. The Redeemer is never once specifically alluded
 “to; in a solitary instance, indeed, his name occurs
 “much in the same manner as it does in Pliny’s letter
 “to Trajan, *merely for the purpose of mentioning his*
 “*adherents, ‘a follower of Christ:’* and what are the
 “doctrines contained in the above-mentioned passages?
 “simply these, that the Divine Being is the Creator
 “and Governor of mankind, with an intimation that his
 “will should be obeyed; but *whether that will has ever*
 “*been revealed it is not easy to infer from the whole tenor*
 “*of this discourse.*”

5. “In short, had this discourse been delivered in the
 “Porch or in the Academy, in a Mahometan Mosque,
 “or in a Jewish Synagogue, we appeal to Dr. Co-
 “pleston’s own judgment, whether, *mutatis mutandis*, any
 “alteration in the argument needed to have been made.
 “In fact, the *mutanda*, in point of expression, are very
 “limited. Gods instead of God; follower of Zeno, or
 “Plato, or Mahomet, or Moses, instead of Christ; phi-
 “losophic or prophetic, instead of apostolic rule; prin-
 “ciples of humanity, instead of Christian charity; the
 “master hath said, or the Koran hath required, or
 “Moses commanded, instead of the letter of Scripture,
 “or God requires; the character of a cardinal, or levi-
 “tical, or musulmanic, instead of a Christian virtue;
 “and every Stoic, or Academic, or Israelite, or Maho-
 “metan, instead of every Christian. These *trivial al-*

"*terations*, according as a change of circumstances might require, would render this Charity Sermon, like Pope's Universal Prayer, capable of being adapted to accommodate any auditory, it being equally and alike applicable to all."

6. "As a Christian minister, he was bound to reason with his congregation upon Christian principles. He ought, like the preacher to the Gentiles, to 'determine to know nothing among' any audience 'but Jesus Christ, and him crucified.' *To be ashamed of Christ and of his Gospel* is an awful consideration indeed: and its awfulness should never be lost sight of by the Christian minister."

If after a perusal of the Sermon these charges should be thought well-founded, it will avail but little to say, that it was approved by the Bishop of the Diocese, who heard it, and by all the Governors who attended. But if they should appear to be undeserved, the unfairness and the indecency of the attack are not a little aggravated by the consideration, that the Author must be known to have undertaken this office for the benefit of a charity, and to have published his Sermon by desire of those whose request it would have ill become him to refuse.

ORIEL COLLEGE,
May 24, 1819.

A SERMON.

1 JOHN iii. 18.

LET US NOT LOVE IN WORD, NEITHER IN TONGUE ;
BUT IN DEED, AND IN TRUTH.

FEW things are more deceitful than general professions of humanity and kindness;—deceitful, not merely to the party who is the object of such professions, but in a still greater degree perhaps to him from whom they proceed; who is often unconscious of the insincerity of his own purpose, and of the feebleness of those benevolent impressions which have not yet been put to the proof. Nay, it has even been observed, that to indulge a habit of exhibiting to the mind artificial descriptions of human misery, however they may soften it for the time, does in reality tend to unfit us for active virtue, unless we be careful to follow up these emotions with a corresponding practice. There is a pleasure which has not unaptly been called “ the luxury of pity;” and, like all

other pleasures, it requires to be regulated and controuled, and kept in subordination to right reason: not merely lest it should lead us to *misplace* our benevolence, (which is itself a great evil,) but lest we should suffer it to become wholly barren and unproductive.

The feeling of pity is a wise provision in our nature, prompting us to assist, relieve, and comfort one another. It would be our duty to do this, even if it were attended with no pleasure to ourselves: but God has made it also pleasurable; that is, he has made us so, that if we do not derive pleasure from it, it is our own fault. But wherever pleasure of any kind interferes, *there* is always danger, lest it should draw us away too much to its own part; causing us to regard itself as *principal*, and to forget the *duty* of which it is an *auxiliary* only, and a super-added reward.

Not that I would speak slightly of all affecting or sentimental appeals to the heart, which have no immediate object but to raise the sensibility of the hearer; for the occasions of real life do not afford equal opportunities to all of cultivating this part of our nature. Some, by their tender age, others by their station, their

business, their retirement, their incapacity for mixing with the world, are so far removed from the sight of actual distress, that were not their sympathy awakened by the recital even of imaginary suffering, the very principle of benevolence might not be sufficiently developed. It might be cramped, or stunted in its growth, or languish and lose all its energy for want of use. A certain degree of discipline and exercise is necessary to keep these feelings in a state fit for action, that they may become quick and moveable when occasion shall require it. The mind, we may be sure, will always be at work ; some of its habits and faculties will ever be in exercise ; and if these have not their due turn, they will be stifled and kept down by the inordinate growth of others.

Neither is the pleasure itself which is derived from listening to an eloquent tale of distress, to be harshly judged of ;—being, as we have seen, not only useful in many cases, but in all harmless, except when carried to excess. Only let us be well aware, that it is of an *usurping* nature, and that if indulged to excess the mind becomes less susceptible than before ; its natural sensibility is impaired by immoderate use, and requires a more powerful stimulus to

produce the same impression : and there is nothing more likely to breed that spurious kind of charity which stops short of action ; and which the apostle condemns under the description of loving in *word* and in *tongue*, but not in *deed* and in *truth*.

Next to exerting our benevolent affections to *no practical purpose*, is the fault of not being careful to direct them towards *proper objects*. This fault may indeed be productive of more real evil than the other ; although it is one of a more hopeful kind ; because it proceeds not from want of inclination but from inattention or from not being properly informed : and it may in general be presumed that a person disposed to exercise this thoughtless charity, will also gladly avail himself of any opportunity he may meet with of doing good with more certainty and discretion.

It would be easy here to enlarge on the evil which flows from an indiscriminate and careless habit of giving to all who ask ;—but the subject has been of late so thoroughly examined and canvassed, and the public mind seems to be so generally enlightened upon this subject, that your assent may well be assumed to all I should have to say upon it. And it is not for the aid of

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That human life, whatever improvements may be effected in the frame of society, will always produce a large demand upon our compassion, is quite certain. It seems to be part of the plan of God's providence in this way to link man with man; to excite and keep alive benevolence, by making them feel their mutual dependence. Thus even under the Jewish economy men were told "that the poor should never cease out of the land;" and they were taught by several affecting precepts, to feed the hungry, to give alms to the poor, and to impart liberally from their abundance.—
 "When thou cuttest down thine harvest in thy field, and hast forgot'a sheaf in the field, thou shalt not go again to fetch it: it shall be for the stranger, for the fatherless, and for the widow. When thou beatest thine olive tree, thou shalt not go over the boughs again. When thou gatherest the grapes of thy vineyard, thou shalt not glean it afterward: it shall be for the stranger, for the fatherless, and for the widow." *Deut. xxiv. 19.*

The *spirit* of these injunctions, it seems to us hardly possible to mistake; and yet we learn from what remains of the old Jewish commentators, that they employed themselves in frivo-

lous disquisitions about the precise meaning of the terms of the precept:—*when* a sheaf might be said to be *forgotten*—*what time* might elapse before the first gathering of the tree or of the vineyard should be considered as finished.—Surely, to find the true import of the passage requires none of these explanations: it applies equally to all times, and to all countries—bidding us not to live to ourselves alone, but in the midst of our plenty to be mindful of others' wants;—to give freely of what we have, and not to take too scrupulous and exact an account of what we give. The particular images selected for the illustration of this universal duty, are naturally adapted to the habits of that country in which the Jews were settled.—Among *them* there were as yet no public institutions for the relief of the distressed; and the most obvious way of exercising systematic charity was that here described.

We ought indeed to bear in mind, that among the *heathen* nations of the earth, not only no institutions for the sick and indigent existed, but no such injunction as that of the Jewish law above mentioned is to be found.—On the subject of relief to the poor, their laws are silent. And it is the glorious distinction of

the Christian religion, that wherever it has been established, it has expanded this maxim of the Mosaic law—not fettering the motive by any specific direction, but calling it into action in every way which the condition of society demands, or which experience may have proved to be most useful. The *end* to be attained and the *motive* for pursuing it, are alone the objects of religious instruction. *How* this motive is to operate, by *what means* we may best attain the proposed *end*, is to be learned elsewhere:—from the employment, that is, of those intellectual powers which were given to us by the Almighty as a talent to be improved in his service. And by employing them sincerely and zealously in the execution of *benvolent* designs, we render the most complete obedience to the apostolic rule, of loving “not in word and in tongue, but in deed and in truth.” For whether in imitation of the narrow-minded Pharisee, we confine our attention to the letter of Scripture, and do no more than seems to be positively commanded, or whether we act in obedience to a blind and inconsiderate impulse of our own nature, in either case we fall short of that perfect fulfilment which it should be the aim of every Christian to render. In the former case, the *will* is deficient, in the latter

the *deed*. It is the union of both which God requires.

It is the just glory of our own country that it contains a variety of institutions founded on the purest principles of Christian charity. To the public these institutions are beneficial in many ways ;—and they obtain the praise of the philosopher and the politician, no less than that of religious and philanthropic men. On their public benefits it is almost needless to expatiate, except for the purpose of impressing on your minds that important relation which they bear to us as Christians ; namely, that they afford opportunities of discharging the great social duty of our religion in the most effectual manner—that they are channels through which we may safely direct the stream of private benevolence, which often either evaporates in empty feeling, or is wasted upon undeserving objects. Under this view of the subject, *the only one which becomes a follower of Christ*^a, it is not enough that the good be done ;—we ought to feel that we ourselves have a hand in the

^a This designation, which is expressly employed to mark the duty arising out of it, the Reviewer says is used just as a heathen writer would use it merely for the purpose of mentioning the adherents of Christ. See Extract 4.

performance of it—to seize with pleasure the means of *acquitting an obligation which binds us all*—and to rejoice in the facilities held out *of obeying God's will*, without the chance of failure, or mistake, or disappointment.

That the general nature of such institutions well deserves what is here said of them, is universally acknowledged ;—and in the present instance I may appeal to your own experience for the proof that in none of the great features which belong to the system, does this shrink from a comparison with all others. In its interior order and economy, in the faithful and frugal administration of its funds, in the liberal and humane treatment of those committed to its care, it challenges the closest and most scrupulous investigation. And here let me be permitted to observe, that it is one of the greatest benefits attending the annual celebration in which we are now engaged, that the public attention is thus periodically drawn to the state and conduct of the institution. It thus lives in the public eye—its prosperity depends on the continuance of public esteem—and it is in no danger of contracting those silent causes of decay which are apt to corrupt the best establishments when long removed from public notice, or which is

nearly the same thing, when they have little to look for from public favour.

Neither is it to be deemed a slight advantage, that when funds are raised by the benevolent contributions of a district for a definite purpose and for a limited time, not only do the individuals whose bounty is thus awakened, feel a livelier interest in the application of their own means, but the strongest possible motive is ever present to the mind of all concerned in it, to carry into full effect the benefactors' purpose ; to convey these healing waters to their destined object from the hand that supplies them, without losing a drop by the way.

If we candidly examine the case of those endowed charities, in the administration of which great abuses have been complained of, we shall in general find that these abuses arise not so much from fraudulent design or depraved habits of thinking and acting, but that lapse of time has brought on forgetfulness and inattention.—A certain *routine* has been established, prudent and just in its commencement, but which the secret and ceaseless change in human affairs soon counteracts and evades, unless a skilful as well as an honest hand keep continual

watch over it. The same names and the same form of proceeding continue, but the institution grows more and more languid and inefficient, till at length its proper guardians are roused from their slumber by some unexpected investigation. Such evils, I say, are incident to the very nature of establishments, placed as their founders fondly imagined upon the most secure basis, that of being independent of the public care. But although it is most heartily to be desired that some permanent foundation should be laid for every useful charity—some stay provided against the fluctuations of personal exertion or public spirit—yet the advantage is undoubtedly great of recurring frequently to the spontaneous bounty of individuals, and thus encouraging them to see how their charity is applied. The transfer in this case is so direct from the giver to the party relieved, that carelessness or profusion receive an immediate check, or rather never find place. For however we may excuse negligence, where the benefaction flows from some distant or unseen hand, long numbered with the dead of other ages, yet when all the persons and circumstances are fresh before our eyes, mere negligence itself is so criminal that it can rarely happen.—It can rarely happen that men will directly and wilfully defeat a

benevolent deed—that they will dry up the source of living charity—or even be remiss in the management of so precious a trust, where *waste* itself becomes a sort of sacrilege.

Another excellent result of this periodical remembrance is, that it draws our attention to the merit of those individuals in the establishment, upon whose professional skill and care depends the success of all our endeavours.—We are thus led to perceive and acknowledge what an important rank they hold, not merely in the fabric of human society, but in the exercise and cultivation of Christian charity.—There is no one, I am confident, be his donation ever so liberal or munificent, who would compare it in point of value with *their* services; services without which all our benevolence would be unavailing, and which not only in their effect but in the sacrifice of time and thought and convenience which they involve, far exceed the contribution of its most zealous friends. For services of this nature well performed, no praises or thanks of ours can be more than adequate. They are performed indeed not for the sake either of thanks or praise; but it is our part still to bestow them, although they are not sought for, and to acknowledge our

obligations to men (for their debtors we are) who make our good deeds fruitful, and who, while they exalt and ennoble their own calling, bring down a blessing upon the alms of others.

It is then, I say, a grateful occasion which brings these duties before our minds, and enables us to express our esteem for those who labour more abundantly than ourselves in the same cause. But to all of us likewise, on our own accounts, it may be useful in many ways. The Apostle exhorts us to love *not in word and in tongue, but in deed and in truth*—and we have been hitherto chiefly occupied in considering how often humane thoughts and feelings fail of producing any practical good ; but there is a defect to which such works are liable, of an *opposite* kind—that is, when the good is really done, but the heart of the giver has little or no share in it. Such is the defect to which all systematic charity is most exposed ; and there is no expedient so fit to counteract it, none so likely to awaken a lively personal interest in the breast, as to be brought at stated intervals to the spot which is the scene of this beneficence—to impress our minds with the sight of the objects connected with it—to partake in the common business of the day—to see, to hear, to converse of these things, and to

get that familiar acquaintance with them which must first subsist before the affections are engaged towards any object.

There is doubtless a propensity in our nature to grow weary of that which is continually repeated; and the charm of novelty contributes something towards that zeal with which useful plans are commonly supported in their first outset;—and it is well for us that we *are* so inclined. For, in the first place, this principle compensates in a great measure for that tendency to decay which is observed in all human contrivances; and again, the most beneficial schemes require more help in their infancy, more active and disinterested exertion to rear them into life, than is called for afterwards to sustain their being. But though it be natural and wise to indulge this inclination, yet it cannot be amiss to remind even the best disposed and most intelligent, that it is apt to carry us too far; and that we ought frequently to reflect on the solid and substantial value of things already established, lest other objects more fascinating from their novelty should supplant them in our affections.

Wide also is the difference between the oc-

casion of our present meeting and the generality of those anniversaries which are held to commemorate some great public blessing. For in most of *them* the lapse of time must needs have the effect of lessening the interest we feel. Year after year the memorable epoch to which they relate, retires farther from the view, and some of the most important begin already to be lost in distance—while as ages roll on, fresh historical events arise, which command our attention, not only by being nearer, and therefore *relatively* greater, but which vie with the others also in their *absolute* importance. But for this work of charity, though we look back with gratitude to the period of its commencement, yet the occasion is as fresh and as pressing now, as in the age of our ancestors. We have no need to search for it in the records of past years: the register of human misery carries on its dark entry from page to page, and pain and want and disease are written in the very charter of our existence. “The poor ye have always
“ with you, and whensoever ye will, ye may do
“ them good.”

Vain then and delusive, or worse than vain, is the wish to extirpate from the condition of human life these demands upon our compassion.

Few indeed, if any, are so absurd as to indulge this visionary hope; but many, it is to be feared, do not sufficiently contemplate the scene thus exhibited to their eyes, or draw the right inference from it. How easy to a being of infinite *power* to have driven this crowd of evils out of his creation!—how delightful to a being of infinite *goodness* to promote the happiness of his creatures!—It *must* then be in the plan of Providence that they should mingle with all human affairs, as a means, if well employed, conducive to that happiness. It must be that they are thrown in our way to awaken our sympathy, and to rouse our activity. Let not then the munificent of one age expect to forestall the charity of the next; much less let the affluent of the present age recline upon the liberality of the past. To each belongs its own share of duty—and let each engage in that duty actively, steadily, and gladly.

Lastly, It is by taking an immediate and personal concern in such charities as these, that we complete the character of a Christian virtue; and of all charities that of relieving the sick affords the surest means of accomplishing this end. The persons here relieved are your own neighbours and dependents, and you may have

full proof of the wants of each individual who applies for assistance. You may see him in his affliction, and converse with him when he has been relieved; you may enjoy a satisfaction which no man can take from you, that of beholding a brother's health restored, his strength repaired, or his life lengthened by your means; and while the blessing is yet fresh in his memory—while the heart is open to the best and kindest impressions, he may have those sentiments instilled into it, which will render the rest of his life not longer only, but happier and better.

How different are the feelings raised by the sight of human suffering, in a mind thus disposed, from those which the same objects excite in the mere worldly moralist! As to the cultivated mind, the desert and the forest, the wilds and the wreck of nature, can reflect agreeable sensations, so may the truly religious man derive consolation and encouragement even from the lazaret-house and the prison. To him they become, if not a garden of delight, at least a field of cheerful industry, in which he knows and feels that he is doing his Lord's work. That work will certainly one day have bestowed upon it a plenteous reward. But the

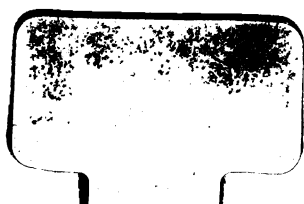
first blessing which attends his labours is that re-action upon his own heart and affections which accompanies every thoroughly good deed. He perceives how God has united mankind by the tenderest ties of mutual succour—and he exults in being made instrumental to that sublime plan of Providence, by which good is brought out of evil, and the pains of this world are made the parents of joy in that which is to come.

THE END.



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1. The first part of the document is a list of names and addresses of the members of the committee.



